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MODERN PAINTING: BY GEORGE MOORE. NEW YORK: CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS: PUBLISHERS

Those who have not been able to read through Mr. Moore's novels need have no fear of his papers on art subjects. He has something to say and says it fearlessly; at times recklessly. The chapters on *Whistler*, on *Chavannes*, *Millet* and *Manet*, on *Monet*, *Sisley*, *Pissaro* and *The Decadence*, and on *Our Academicians*, the kind of art fostered by the English Royal Academy, are all interesting. *Royalty in Art*, *Art Patrons* and *Picture Dealers* are amusing, and the others are readable and full of sharp points. The book is written from the standpoint of the advanced school, the emancipated wing of English painters, and much of it sounds like studio talk, abounding with hits at the Philistine, whether in or out of art.

Though a publication of 1893, the subject-matter of Mr. Moore's book is so directly in line with the plan of work chosen for this magazine that some extracts from it are still pertinent

An evil in the art of the day seems to him to be a certain blank and commonplace realism, a false realism of which we have all seen examples; we recognize the description of the way in which "Mr. Stanhope Forbes copied the trousers seam by seam, patch by patch; and the ugliness of the garment bores you in the picture exactly as it would in nature." But let Mr. Moore tell his own story:

"Realism, that is to say the desire to compete with nature, to be nature, is the disease from which art has suffered most in the last twenty years. * * How terrible a thing art becomes when divorced from beauty, grace, mystery and suggestion! * * It would be difficult to say where and how this picture (of peasants, by George Clausen) differs from a photograph; it seems to me little more than the vices of photography magnified. He has gone farther, in abject realism, than a photograph. * It is probable that these peasants would not look so ugly in a photograph as they do in this picture. For had they been photographed the chances are that some shadow would have clothed, would have hid, something, and a chance gleam might have concentrated the attention on some particular spot. * The picture is one long explanation; it is as clear as a newspaper, and it reads like one. We can tell how many months that man in the foreground has worn those dreadful hobnailed boots; we can count the nails, and we notice that two or three are missing. * All the ugliness of these laborers' faces and the solid earthiness of their lives are there; nothing has been omitted, curtailed or exaggerated. * The painter has seen nothing of the legendary patriarchal beauty and solemnity which lend so holy a charm to Millet's Breton folk. Mr. Clausen has seen

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nothing but the sordid and the mean. * * It is a handful of dry facts, instead of a passionate impression of life in its envelope of mystery and suggestion. The mission of art is not truth, but beauty, and I know of no great work—I will go even farther, I know of no even tolerable work—in literature or in painting in which the element of beauty does not inform the intention.”

Then, a word about the methods of the *plein air* extremist:

“It is the theory of Mr. Clausen that it is right and proper to take a six-foot canvas into the open, and paint the entire picture from nature. But when the sun is shining, it is not possible to paint for more than an hour—an hour and a half at the most. At the end of that time the shadows have moved so much that the effect is wholly different. But on a gray day it is possible to paint on the same picture for four or five hours. Hence the preference shown by this school for gray days.”

These are evils which come from France, and another one is the disintegrating influence of that French art of which Bouguereau is the chief exponent—“the detestable French painting, this mechanical drawing and modeling, built up systematically, and into which nothing of the artist’s sensibility may enter.” He deplores “the steady obliteration of all English feeling and mode of thought. * * The young men practice an art purged of all nationality,” and the Academy is responsible.

“Those who desire to be English Academicians must adopt the French method. * Under the guidanceship of the Academy English art has lost all that charming naivete and simplicity which was so long its distinguishing mark. * * This mechanical art has spread from Paris all over Europe, blotting out in its progress all artistic expression of racial instincts and mental characteristics. * * Mr. Waterhouse’s picture of *Circe Poisoning the Sea* is an excellent example of professional French painting. The drawing is planned out geometrically, the modeling is built up mechanically. The brush, filled with thick paint, works like a trowel. * In the hands of the Dutch and Flemish artists the brush was in direct communication with the brain, and moved slowly or rapidly, changing from the broadest and most emphatic stroke to the most delicate and fluent touch, according to the nature of the work. But here all is square and heavy. The color scheme, the blue dress and the green water—how theatrical, how its richness reeks of the French studio!”

Discouraged by the popular taste in pictures, he exclaims:

“The public can distinguish very readily—far better than it gets credit for—between bad literature and good; nor is the public quite deaf to good music, but the public seems quite powerless to distinguish between good painting and bad. * No, I am wrong; it distinguishes very well between bad painting and good, only it invariably prefers the bad.

"Of all languages none is so difficult, so varying, so complex, so evanescent as that of paint; and yet it is precisely the works written in this language that everyone believes himself able to understand. * * The original taste of man is always for the obvious and the commonplace, and it is only by great labor and care that man learns to understand as beautiful that which the uneducated eye considers ugly." * *

What is the choice of the average British art patron? "Vulgarly painted sunsets, vulgarly painted doctors, vulgarly painted babies, vulgarly painted manor-houses with saddle-horses and a young lady hesitating on the steps." The standard of the official art of his country is even worse. "The Queen, her spouse and her children appear to be singularly *bourgeois*," in an apparently irrepressible fondness for having their portraits painted, and he mentions again what has long been an open artistic scandal, with such portraitists in England as Frank Holl and George F. Watts.

"In no instance has the choice fallen on a painter of talent; but the middling from every country in Europe seem to have found a ready welcome at the court of Queen Victoria. We find there middling Germans, middling Italians, middling Frenchmen—and all receiving money and honors from our Queen."

Then follows this audacious paragraph:

"The Queen and the Prince Consort do not seem to have been indifferent to art, but to have deliberately and with rare instinct always picked out what was most worthless; and regarded in the light of documents, these pictures are valuable, for they tell plainly the real mind of the Royal Family. We see at once that the family mind is wholly devoid of humor; the very faintest sense of humor would have saved them from exhibiting themselves in so ridiculous a light. The large picture of the Queen and the Prince Consort, surrounded with their children, the Prince Consort in knee breeches, showing a finely turned calf, is sufficient to occasion the overthrow of a dynasty if humor were the prerogative of the many instead of the few. This masterpiece is signed, "By G. Belli, after F. Winterhalter;" and in this picture we get the mediocrity of Italy and Germany in quintessential strength. * So like is one picture to another that the (Victorian) exhibition seems to reveal the secret that for the last fifty years the family has done nothing but paint itself. And in these days, when every one does a little painting, it is easy to imagine the family at work from morn to eve. Immediately after breakfast the easels are set up, the Queen paints the Princess Louise, the Duke of Edinburgh paints Princess Beatrice, the Princess Alice paints the Prince of Wales, etc. The easels are removed for lunch, and the moment the meal is over work is resumed."

The chapter on "the decadence of art in France" is one which merits serious thought, though one may not at all agree with him. After describing the constant war of schools in Paris and the art vagaries, the symbolists, the dividers of tones and the professors of the rhythm of gesture, "truly a difficult subject to write about in English—perhaps it is one that should not be attempted anywhere except in a studio with closed doors," he says:

"But, if in my description of these schools I have conveyed the idea of stupidity or ignorance, I have failed egregiously. These young men are all highly intelligent and keenly alive to art, and their doings are not more vain than the hundred and one artistic notions which have been undermining the art-sense of the French and English nations for the last twenty years. * * *

"Great art dreams, imagines, sees, feels, expresses—reasons, never. It is only in times of woeful decadence, like the present, that the bleating of the schools begins to be heard. * * The separation of the method of expression from the idea to be expressed is the sure sign of decadence. France is now all decadence. In the Champ de Mars, as in the Salon, the man of the hour is he who has invented the last trick in subject or treatment.

"France has produced great artists in quick succession. Think of all the great names, beginning with Ingres and ending with Degas, and wonder if you can that France has at last entered on a period of artistic decadence. For the last sixty years the work done in literary and pictorial art has been immense; the soil has been worked along and across, in every direction; and for many a year nothing will come to us from France but the bleat of the scholiast."

Still, these eccentricities may appear on the surface of great art movements, and the fact that the interest in art is so much alive in France to-day may prevent all of us from taking such a hopeless view of her future.

The book has few dull chapters and is well worth a careful reading.

